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MEMORABLE CITIZEN



On April 7, 1932, the South Shore Life published a tribute to Knapp, saying in part: "The men of the Duxbury Fire Department, headed by Chief H.E. Merry, were present in uniform, and there was a full attendance of town officials to pay this leading citizen the honor which he had so well earned.

"He built up one of the greatest boys' schools of Massachusetts, conducting it personally for 18 years. The school continued for many years after he retired as its head. Many a man in high position blesses the influence cast around his life by the Powder Point school and by the great and good man who was its principal.

DUXBURY CLIPPER

"Duxbury knew Mr. Knapp as a stalwart exponent of the best things for the town. Serving in the ranks as a forest fireman, again leading his men as chief, helping to form the South Shore Forest Warden's Association and later the strong Plymouth County Foresters Association, he added to civic interest the personality of a strong man.

"A leader in the Duxbury Rural Society, he was of great value as a counselor for many an endeavor which has worked for the benefit of Duxbury. His private life was spotless and his memory will be revered.

"The funeral was held in his late home, the former Weston mansion on King Caesar Road, Duxbury."

A boulder was moved from northwest Duxbury to its present location in the Frederick Bradford Knapp Forest on Mayflower St.

Here, on Arbor Day in 1934, a company of those who wished to honor Mr. Knapp gathered, including alumni of his school and prominent national leaders.

"I was a shy, diffident boy, away from home for the first time, therefore a little homesick. Mr. and Mrs. Knapp noticing this, invited me for a drive to get me out of my pessimistic mood. I was tongue-tied, not easy to get along with in a conversational manner, and sat in silence most of the way. Finally I got the odor of wildflowers and just for something to say, I remarked 'How sweet the air is tonight.' Just then we drove in range of a particularly offensive skunk. The situation was too much for Mr. and Mrs. Knapp and they both laughed. I was horrified at my bad luck and resolved not to speak again, but Mr. Knapp with his usual tact explained that it was not my statement that made them laugh, but because the skunk just happened to be there, and in a few minutes had me entirely at ease by discussing some subject of mutual interest.

"He was willing to try anything...In one case, when I was teaching under him I wished to go to Boston on the noon train, but a Latin Class interfered. Mr. Knapp offered to take that class for me if I in return would take his Trigonometry class the next day to enable him to go to Plymouth. 'But,' said I, 'I have only had two lessons in Trigonometry in my life.' 'Well,' he said, 'that is more than I have had in Latin. You make the boys put their theorems on the blackboard and explain them and the other boys will check the mistakes.' So we swapped classes and it worked out perfectly.

"It was my doubtful honor to furnish the material for Duxbury's largest house fire -- Powder Point Hall in 1922. When the fire was discovered I sent for Mr. Knapp who came over at once and began a fight which lasted until it was useless to fight longer. Several times under his direction we apparently had the fire out, only to

have it break out anew in another place. When I found the entire roof ablaze and our meager supply of water exhausted, I said to Mr. Knapp, who was knocking away plaster with a baseball bat, 'It's no use, the whole building is on fire.' He did not stop a second, but gave me a look of amazement over his shoulder and said, 'Don't give up. Fight, fight, fight.' And we did, but to no avail. One story of that fire always amused Mr. Knapp. It was reported to him that when Chief Eden Soule asked me if every one was out of the building, then a roaring furnace, I replied, 'Yes, everyone is out,' then as an afterthought, 'That is, all except Mr. Knapp.' I do not remember the incident, but if I did make such a statement it was intended as a tribute to Mr. Knapp's ability to take care of himself under all conditions and not that it made no difference whether he was out or in.

"He was a man of great physical power and endurance, and although handicapped by injuries, was a splendid skater, fearless swimmer and thoroughly at home in a boat. It was a source of regret to him that his boys took more interest in baseball and football than in rowing. He would have enjoyed sending a crew from Powder Point to compete with Boston schools.

"On one occasion, trouble came with the piping during the night and it was necessary to ask his advice. He insisted on dressing and taking charge of the repairs from two o'clock until after daybreak. This is only one of many examples of his neighborly interest and brings me to my last word, my opinion, of Mr. Knapp after 35 years of association with him.

"He was a fine type of good old Yankee, with broad understanding, a great fund of sympathy, and every inch a man."

MEMORABLE CITIZEN

Frederick Bradford Knapp was a forester, publicist and educator. Here are excerpts from a memorial compiled by his friends in 1933. The thin volume was published by the Duxbury fire companies:

"The desire to preserve a splendid memory, in as permanent a form as possible, has created this commemorative volume, which is to bring down to the time of future generations, the story, that in Duxbury town of the South Shore of Massachusetts, there lived and worked during the years, 1885-1932, one of the grandest types of American manhood, Frederick Bradford Knapp.

"Traits of a fine ancestry showed forth in the man whom we knew. It was said of his father, Rev. Frederick Newman Knapp, who resided in Plymouth for 30 years, that 'he hated, with righteous indignation, falsehood, injustice, lustfulness, meanness. With all this moral sternness was united as gentle, as sympathetic, as compassionate a spirit as ever breathed in human form. He was everywhere and always a true Minute-man of God. Wherever he went, winter always seemed set back to autumn or summer.' (Memorial booklet, Frederick Newman Knapp, published 1889, the quotations being from the address of Rev. John H. Heywood.)

Mr. Knapp's grandfather, Jacob Newman Knapp, of Walpole, N.H., wrote an autobiography, a copy of which is in the possession of Miss Elizabeth Knapp, at Duxbury. Therefore it is an uncontroverted fact that each of these three men, including our friend, contributed so much to education, to public service, to community affairs, that their lives did not go out as bubbles burst, but they left a tangible record. Well is it that we carry out this suggestion of Mr. Knapp's comrades in the Duxbury Fire Department and preserve a definite record for the years to come.

"A meeting was held at Engine House No. 2, Duxbury, on Feb. 14, 1933 for the purpose of presenting a picture of Frederick Bradford Knapp to Fire Companies No. 1 and 2.

"The meeting was opened by Chief H.E. Merry.

On the following day, a local paper reported: "The memory of the just is blessed," is a wise proverb, and this thought was exemplified Tuesday night, when miles of travel on slippery highways did not deter men from coming long distances in response to an earnest invitation by Chief H.E. Merry of the Duxbury Fire Department... The occasion was the presentation of portraits of two former chiefs of the department, and the particular interest of the men who came from a distance, was in the commemorative exercises emphasizing the life and good works of the late Frederick B. Knapp, educator, publicist, fireman, and good citizen. He had been photographed in a most happy mood, his pose breezily characteristic of his urbanity, his cheerfulness and his great energy. He lived again for the blessings of his friends."

At the Annual Town Meeting
in 1933, H.E. Merry said:

"Citizens of Duxbury:
Through 50 years Frederick

B. Knapp contributed of his character, his abilities and of his means for our well being. All about us is evidence of his effort.

"Chief Justice Rugg said with respect to another, 'The perspective of time is required before a generation can arise with a wide vision unwarped by interest and free from bias, able to appraise his achievements at their true worth.'

"Let us not wait for another generation to arise, but NOW and HERE act. I move the adoption of the following:

"Resolved: The Town Forest shall be known as the Frederick Bradford Knapp Forest. The forest authorities of the U.S. and of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts be invited to cooperate in the desire to honor the memory of him whose service to mankind we hereby proclaim."

It was so resolved.

Sidney Soule, chairman of the board of selectmen, said in 1933:

"I am going back 35 years, which in my mind is the beginning of fire fighting, and knowing Mr. Knapp's ability in fire fighting in those days when we had to depend on the old horse-drawn tubs. He was certainly an ardent fire fighter, always on the job and always watching that everything was done to put out the fire entirely wherever they went. He was chief at that time.

"Mr. Knapp has, of course, been interested chiefly in forestry, as well as fire fighting, and was always on the job in protecting the forests which he had love for and I think as time went on, although he still had the interest, he didn't get into it with the whole heart and soul that he did in previous years when it was all hand work.

That year Henry P. Moulton was both Town Clerk and Moderator.

Excerpts from Phillip Moulton's speech:

"I came to Duxbury as a school boy, thoroughly disgusted with the overcrowded city high school and wishing to discontinue school life altogether, but through Mr. Knapp's ability to understand and handle the situation I took an interest once more in education... 'I have never seen a man, in college or out, who could impart knowledge to others as Mr. Knapp could. He was one of the greatest mathematicians in the State and more than that, he had the power of transmitting his knowledge clearly...

DUXBURY CLIFFER

Thursday, February 8, 1968

MEMORABLE CITIZEN

(Frederick Bradford Knapp was a prominent Duxbury citizen. "For half a century the annals of Duxbury record the efforts and achievements of this man," said Charles Clark in a speech given in 1933. Read some of the other things Clark had to say. -- Ed.)

"Without attempting to enumerate them, we find him in 1887 a member of the committee to arrange for the observance of the 250th anniversary of the incorporation of Duxbury. His special duties were to take charge of the field sports and the grand ball in Duxbury Hall.

"The same year he was chosen a trustee of Partridge Academy. In 1889, as president of the Duxbury Rural Society, he directed the work of locating and suitably marking the grave of Myles Standish. In recent years wide publicity was given to his revival of the old fashioned BEE as a means of creating a better knowledge of the Rules of the Road.

"As a conservator he early realized the importance of fire prevention. It is not too much to say that the foundation which his trained mind and engineering talent created years ago is in large measure responsible for the admirable morale and efficiency for which the Duxbury Fire Department is today so justly famed and which makes it an economic asset to the community.

"As an educator the fame of his school brought to Duxbury boys from the far ends of the earth. Two pictures stand out in memory:

"One: when he arose to address the Moderator and awaiting recognition, he stood erect, shoulders squared, his whole being tense and alert to catch the chairman's glance. Perfectly poised, conscious of his rights and ready to assert them, yet withal an attitude of absolute respect for constituted authority. Yet all the while his right hand resting gently on the back of a chair seemed to add a touch of human kindness to the scene. The other picture is of the early fall in the nearby woodland of the Rural Society. Then a man of three score ten and more, with powerful strokes of the axe, well directed, he demonstrated the craft of the woodsman, the pioneer as was Lincoln while the fire which cheered and warmed his associates was tended with the skill of a conservator."

At the banquet at which H.E. Merry was toastmaster, William Ford said in part:

"When Chief Merry told me what he had in mind, it seemed to me it was the most fitting tribute that could be paid Mr. Knapp. My acquaintance with him began 25 years ago, on the fire line, and from then until his death we worked together, but not until the spring of 1922 did I really begin to know him. At that time through his efforts the organization known as The Wardens of the South Shore was organized, and from that time on I was associated with him in the suppression and extinguishment of fires....I well remember at one of our annual warden meetings he advanced, along with other ideas the use of the radio as part of the fire equipment, and the idea was ridiculed down....He was always working to save the forest. He was also a strong believer in publicity and in getting the public interested, especially the school children in this fire work."

Excerpts from M.C. Hutchins' speech:

"On assuming the duties of State Fire Warden in 1911, Mr. Knapp was one of the first men to offer his cooperating in establishing a fire prevention system and from that day until his illness last summer I received his hearty cooperation. He was a pioneer in forest fire work and during the years of 1908, 1909 and 1910 and again in 1917 he served as forest warden of Duxbury with credit.

"He was a prime mover of the first forest warden organization in the state. Today we have ten such organizations in the state doing excellent work.

Chief H.E. Merry of the Fire Department thus spoke at the testimonial banquet in 1933:

"Mr. Moulton thinks he knew Mr. Knapp, but I knew him better than any man in Duxbury. We drove hundreds of miles at night going to and coming home from forest fire meetings. We visited every town in the county and some other counties early and often.

"He loved the forest; he worked for the preservation, for the reforestation and for fire prevention in them. Few men

here knew that when there was a bad fire on the Cape he would take a pack on his back and stay on the fire line two or three days at a time just to find out this point -- what was the zero hour of a forest fire. This is what he told me -- the hour before and after dawn because the dew is the heaviest and the wind quietest. That is what he did and continued to do.

(To be concluded)